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■ IN THE BACKGROUND

MISSING PERSONS . . .

A half-century of history stood behind the short notice, published about three weeks ago in one or two newspapers, that a small aircraft carrying two men was overdue, and presumed down, somewhere in the Caribbean.

The pilot, Geoff Sullivan, and his passenger, Alex Rorke Jr., had left Florida on September 23, bound for Panama, on private business (setting up a rock lobster importing firm). En route they radiocd a change of destination to Managua, Nicaragua. They landed, instead, on the island of Cozumel, just off Yucatan, and reported engine trouble. Two days later, September 25, they took off from Cozumel, bound for Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and they have not been heard from since.

Alex Rorke's wife has tried to get U.S. authorities to search for the aircraft, but their response has been, it is said, perfunctory. Perhaps she and the three young children should not have expected more, for Rorke has been in trouble with the U.S. Government.

One D. F. Cardoza, a customs supervisor, has threatened Rorke with a \$5,000 fine and two years in jail. As reported by columnist Robert S. Allen, Cardoza explained to Rorke that the order came "directly from the Great White Father in Washington—President Kennedy." The State Department had previously grounded two other planes Rorke had used, by canceling the certificates permitting flights to the Caribbean. Still earlier, customs officials had threatened to shoot the tires of his plane if a takeoff was attempted.

Rorke, of course, had invited this trouble by making a series of incredible air raids on Castro's Cuba in the last

two years, culminating in a bombing raid on an oil refinery outside Havana last April. Some said he had the help of the CIA in these activities. Rorke's anti-Castroism is personal: in August 1959 he was jailed by Castro while covering Cuba on assignment from NBC-TV; he has claimed to be the first U.S. citizen Castro jailed. And Rorke's anti-Communism is professional and traditional: his earlier career includes work with the FBI, and military intelligence in Germany, and he was in on the first postwar dragnet of Communists in the Allied Zone of Germany. Back in 1919 his father, then Assistant District Attorney in New York, prosecuted the founders of the Communist Party, U.S.A.

At one time or another the U.S. Government has sent military or other search teams after vacationers in Mexico, or Nelson Rockefeller's boy lost off New Guinea; even cattle stranded in blizzards on the western plains have had bales of hay dropped to them from Air Force C-119s. But Alex Rorke apparently will have to go it alone. Unless somebody nudges Great White Father.